

# Fit for a King



Architect Stephen Dynia pays homage to the utilitarian indigenous structures of Western America.

A dignified glass wall is scaled to bring a wide-open view of the mountains into this Jackson house without dominating the structure from inside or out.

Greg Hursley

Architect Stephen Dynia designed this secluded and serene little studio (right) to feel comfortably disconnected from the core energies of the house—a small "building within a building."

Roger Wade



Architect Stephen Dynia loves alleys. A most wonderful collection of odd, dilapidated, beautiful structures weathered into myriad colors and textures line the alleys of many Western towns, he points out. So when client Bill King presented a city lot stretching between street and alleyway in Jackson, Dynia conceived a residence respectful of its eclectic, somewhat scruffy surroundings.

story by Peter Anderson

photography by Roger Wade and Greg Hursley



The interior of the house is designed to feel bright but cool, rising from dark walnut floors over stainless steel kitchen surfaces and vivid blue plaster walls to broad ceiling panels in pale maple.

Roger Wade

To mesh the homeowner's sophisticated tastes with a rough-and-ready resort town required an unusual design approach. Dynia's trademark style is modern with a neo-Western edge. In this case, he wrapped a lean, linear, minimalist structure in weather-worn patinas of metal and dark stained wood. Panels formed of deep horizontal corrugations and attached with stainless steel bolts side the lower exterior walls, suggesting conversely both log construction and industrial fabrication. Patchy sheets of steel rusted to a warm tree-bark hue rise above. A small room floats on slender knee braces over the alley entrance to the house. The building is rustic. It's also unabashedly modern.

Rustic modernity, Dynia observes, pays homage to the utilitarian indigenous structures of Western America's past, namely the architecture of ranches, mines and farms. Such buildings were cobbled together out of scarce available materials to suit the needs of the moment. The King house elegantly acknowledges the energetic, organic architecture encountered in worn-out mining towns, along railroad sidings and among the huddles of outlying ranches. It acknowledges but doesn't emulate, quietly avoiding the comedy of architectural mimicry.

The 2,300-square-foot residence sits deep in the old heart of town. A row of evergreens and willows sheaths the

The blue curved wall, exposed steel beams and rusted metal finishes collaborate to provide a pleasing and sensuous array of visual configurations.

Roger Wade



Custom-designed steel trusses are integral to the roof and wall structure. All visible elements of the design are clearly performing their assigned tasks.

Roger Wade

house from its side street, allowing glimpses through the greenery of Cache Creek and the National Elk Refuge eastward. The site's longitudinal orientation affords an astonishing straight-on view of Snow King Mountain's steep face a few blocks south. Up a short walkway from the alley, the understated entrance is protected by a wall extension on one side and the cantilevered room above.

Inside the King house, natural light angles through a row of windows lining the upper east flank. The glass wall facing Snow King Mountain is tall enough to engage the glorious view and disciplined enough not to overwhelm the viewer. A tree-shaded deck opens beyond.

Central to the design is a long, gently curving wall that pulls an observer's gaze into the house. Scaled large, the wall is sheer and smooth but for two untrimmed windows on the second level.

"Minimalism," Dynia comments, "means what isn't there is as important as what is there."

A tier of halogen sconces encircles the upper level just below ceiling height. Black-painted steel beams with stainless cabling form the stairway to the upper level. Similar exposed steel beams comprise the joists beneath the second floor. →

In true modernist style, themes from the outside of the building are drawn inside and repeated. Thus, the mellow rusted steel of the exterior walls continues onto various surfaces inside. The interior steel stairway replicates the steps outside, which climb to the south deck along the wall in fire-escape fashion. The roof structure ties across the long central axis with slim, custom-designed steel trusses painted black, another trademark touch recurring often in Dynia's designs. Visible structures and hardware in this house are all real—architectural gewgaws are conspicuously absent. The honesty of modernism means structural elements are all actually doing what they look like they're doing, Dynia explains.

The narrow, linear building relies on its heavy concrete west wall for seismic rigidity. Eschewing the temptation to disguise this massive structure, the architect instead filled each bay between the wall's pillars with



The entrance to the King house (above), like its alley approach, is a vignette of surfaces, suggestions and structural metaphors. A studio floats on braces above, sheltering the doorway.

Greg Hunkley

Building materials suggest conversely both log construction and industrial fabrication, acknowledging the architecture found in worn-out mining towns, along railroad sidings and among the huddles of outlying ranches in the West.

Boyer Wann

cabinets, kitchen range, entertainment center and, on both levels, fireplaces, leaving the wall's musculature obvious. The fireplace upstairs is raised to waist height, visible above the furniture in the living area.

A divided bathroom upstairs is finished in velvety slate. The glass ceiling fills the compact lavatory and shower with light. The bathroom feels like an altogether different enclosure from the house—a "building within a building." Finally, a studio occupies the floating room a few steps above the second level. Quiet and detached, its elevated northward view clears the crests of the Gros Ventre buttes and catches the tip of the Grand Teton. It, too, is a separate structure within the larger.

Dynia practiced architecture for many years with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, an international firm responsible for some of the world's most interesting contemporary buildings, such as the Times Square Building in New York and the Sears Tower in Chicago. He admits he'd be quickly bored designing log lodge knock-offs. The cutting edge in the West, he believes, is the bridge between its fascinating architectural heritage and modernist sensibilities. The King house illustrates how architectural reference to fundamental aspects of modern design—structural dynamics, free-floating spaces, use of glass, stark surfaces, lack of ornamentation and so forth—can simultaneously refer to indigenous utilitarian architecture. If we look closely, Dynia points out, the West's past connects subtly but powerfully to the purest elements of modern style. ♦

